



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## SPECIAL ARTICLES

### LITERARY NAPLES BEFORE THE WAR

BY HENRY DWIGHT SEDGWICK

MOST American travelers to Italy do not cross the Alps by the Brenner Pass or Mt. Cenis, as earlier barbarians were wont to do; they enter by the Gulf of Naples. The steamer leaves to her right the jagged outline of Capri and passing close to Ischia, Procida and the Cape of Misenum, swings slowly within the mole and discharges its passengers into an entrancing bewilderment of color, noise and odor.

Once landed the crowd of Barbarians divides into two categories. The larger consists of bridal couples, old maids traveling in companies, elderly folks in quest of warmth, enterprising pilgrims seeking quick harvests of culture, and in general all those who have no resources for recreation in themselves. These people *do* the Museum and the Aquarium in the morning, motor to Pozzuoli and Baïe in the afternoon; on the following day polish off Pompeii, Salerno, Amalfi and Sorrento; and, on the third day, after brilliantly disposing of Capri, they are comfortably on their way to Rome. All this is delightful to do—and energetic Barbarians know their own minds.

The second category comprises people of middle age who have been to Naples before, professors and students ambitious to become professors, dilettanti, sufferers from imaginary ailments and others of a leisurely temperament. These add some historical perspective to the foreground of bewildering color and theatrical beauty. They visit the Lake of Avernus and the Phlegraean fields, dredge their memories for scraps of Virgil and, discouraged by not recovering more than *varium et mutabile semper foemina*, re-read the sixth book of the *Æneid*. They seek out the piazza where young Corradino, last of the Hohenstaufens, lost his head; they stop by the Castel dell'Uovo and listen to the waves that dash against its sullen base endlessly reiterating *per viltate gran rifiuto, per viltate gran rifiuto*, for within those walls the poor old Pope Celestine V renounced the papal crown and so incurred the scorn of the greatest dispenser of posthumous honor and disgrace that ever lived, Dante Alighieri, whose only mention of him is *colui che fece per viltate il gran rifiuto*—he that made through baseness the great refusal. They get out Petrarch's letters and read how, on the way to receive the laurel crown on the Capitoline Hill, he stopped to be examined in universal knowledge by King Robert the Wise and took a *summa cum laude*. They search the Decameron for the adventures of Andreuccio in the Eastcheap of Naples, and visit the Church of San Lorenzo to see the spot where Boccaccio first saw, or feigned to see, the lovely Fiammetta. Or, if they are of a more modern turn of mind, they read what Goethe has to say of Naples in the

Italienische Reise, they reopen the scandal of Nelson and Lady Hamilton, take up Mr. Gladstone's "Letters to Lord Aberdeen" or read Trevelyan's wonderful story of Garibaldi and *i mille*.

In spite of this historical background, or rather in consequence of it, the second category is as blind as the first to Naples of to-day. The curtain of centuries shuts off the present scene. Of course nobody can avoid the patient donkeys, the turkeys, the chickens, the herds of goats, the motherly cows with their attendant calves, the troops of soldiers, the purple-ribboned priests, the unwashed monks, the jaunty carabinieri, and all the ambulatory vendors that constitute the visible aspect of the gay city. And it is likely that members of the second category have been to San Carlo to hear Falstaff, or to the begilded Teatro Sannazaro to hear Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto*; and they will have heard at the Mercadante one of the best comic actors in Europe, Eduardo Scarpetta. But these theatres are merely tourist-haunted purlieus of the real city. Naples is no longer the city of our fathers' time, nor the city of our youth; during the last twenty years it has changed, almost as much as an American city west of the Alleghanies. Foreign capital and native enterprise have combined to revivify the old Bourbon capital. Beggary is itself in a beggarly condition, surviving chiefly for the benefit of penny-foolish foreigners. The slummy streets are losing their immemorial characteristics. The larger shops are adopting the system of *prezzi fissi*. Twenty lines of trolley interfere with donkey carts and *carrozzelle*; a subway to run from Virgil's Tomb to the railway station, some three miles or more, has been begun. Factories are starting up; German, English and Milanese money is earning dividends in and about the city. The capital of the Mezzogiorno has waked up.

It is not in business alone that Naples is become a city of importance. She holds worthy rank in things of the mind, literature, scholarship and philosophy.

Of all living feminine novelists (and the list is not short) in certain respects there is none to equal Matilde Serao. Readers of Henry James will remember his essay on her, in which his tortuously penetrating mind as usual glides like a snake into its hole, though a wide difference in temperament, in experience, in philosophy of life, render him scantily just in his estimate. Her earlier books have the freshness, the spontaneity, the facile sureness of genius; they (so the Neapolitans say) depict life in terms of motion and catch the flutterings of red kerchiefs and the flicker of Neapolitan

passion. Later books, clever as they are, like *Il Paese di Cuccagna* or *Suor Giovanna della Croce* show how the prison house of mannerism has begun to close in and impede the early freedom that had been her master trait.

The next conspicuous figure in literature is Roberto Bracco. Now that Giacosa is no more, if we exclude d'Annunzio as a writer of tragic poetry rather than a dramatist, Bracco is the most distinguished playwright in Italy. His published plays fill ten volumes. Little known in America outside the scanty band that frequents the Italian counter in Brentano's bookshop, he is well known in Europe. For nearly thirty years his plays have been acted in Italy; they range from light farce to tragedy. To us, absorbed or distraught by the myriad forms of human activity that promise consideration on Wall Street and upper Fifth Avenue, that dangle before our eyes sixty horse-power motor cars, frescoed halls and bedizened drawing-rooms, the purely psychological analysis of a human being fails in significance. Bracco cares nothing for the economic animal; he belongs to the post-Ibsen psychological school and makes *la donna* his specialty. We class women as suffragettes or antis, house-keeping or modern, smart or dowdy, goodlooking or homely, married or single; having done this, our task is finished. Bracco is indifferent to all such categories. Impelled by his artistic temperament and scientific mind, he fixes his whole attention on woman, especially in the earlier years of womanhood when the feminine spirit is more mobile in its response to the caress or whip of circumstance, and watches it stir, expand and contract under the stimulus of womanly or maternal love. Bracco is still far from old, still susceptible, still scorches his wings in the glorious feminine flame. What American dramatist ever aroused sufficient interest to fill ten volumes with the adventures of his mind?

If we pass from the novel and the drama to scholarship, we keep on the same high level. The University of Naples, handsomely lodged, is the chief seat of learning for the Mezzogiorno. Six thousand students attend its various faculties. No faculty enjoys a higher reputation than that of philosophy and letters. Eminent in this faculty is the *Presidente* Francesco Torraca, well known among students of Italian literature all over the world for his comments on Dante, his studies on Boccaccio and other scholarly works. Precise, accurate, searching, sifting, weighing, bound to satisfy the demands of an exigent conscience, Professor Torraca examines a question of scholarship like a judge in a court of last resort. He never lets his feet stray from the narrow path of "documentation" (or whatever scholars call it) by the allurements of pictorial fancy, nor follow the gleam of divination. He belongs to the school that builds its ark out of charters, records, codices, and lets who will drown in the floods of conjecture.

Another scholar, well known to American students, once a professor in the University but in his ripe years resting under his laurels, was Giuseppe de Blasiis. In youth his adventurous spirit could not endure the Bourbon dominion; he fled to Piedmont, enlisted in the army, fought in the Crimea, was captured by the Russians and (for the Russians of that day had the same notions of Italians that our parents had) was bidden to sing grand

opera and dance a ballet. Before the war he was president of the *Società Napoletana di Storia Patria*, and editor of its learned review. But since the war began he has died full of years, to the deep regret of many friends.

Another man of letters, in his prime a distinguished figure in Italian literature, was Bonaventura Zumbini, *Senatore del Regno*. In that pleasant land men of eminence in literature are made senators. Had, for instance, William James, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and James Ford Rhodes been Italians, they would all have been senators. Zumbini has not only busied himself with Italian literature but also with great writers in foreign literatures—German, French and more particularly English. His studies on Milton and Bunyan, translated into English, caught Gladstone's hawk eye—*gli occhi grifagni*—an acquaintance sprang up that ripened in friendship. Zumbini was old enough to remember still the immense debt that Naples, crushed under Bourbon bigotry and incapacity, owed to Mr. Gladstone; his eyes shone like twin stars when he mentioned the great Englishman, and he was devoting himself with the zeal of eternal youth to a book that should recount clearly to the coming generation the whole story of Mr. Gladstone's chivalric services to Italy, when death interrupted his labors; he died almost like Petrarch, pillowed upon his books.

In philosophy, all the world that likes its philosophy mixed, half and half, with literature and flavored with fashion, is agog for that most delightful and stimulating artist M. Bergson. He is honored by three great capitals—Paris, London, New York; but in Oxford, at least so it is said, with many dons the name of Benedetto Croce stands in higher repute. In his own country Benedetto Croce has long been famous; he, too, is a senator; and in France, Germany and England he has long been honorably known. In the United States he is known sporadically. In 1912, when the Rice Institute of Houston, Texas, celebrated its inauguration, its president invited Signor Croce to deliver some lectures on the philosophy of aesthetics. Croce unfortunately was not able to go, but his lectures were written and published. His principal works are "*Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*," "*Logica come scienza del concetto puro*," "*Filosofia della pratica-economica ed etica*."

Senator Croce inhabits, as a philosopher should, one of those palaces where space flows on gently from room to room, fit home for thought, alone with a shining and goodly company of books. There, it may be said of him (one hopes) what he himself says of the great Neapolitan philosopher Giovanni Battista Vico, nearly in Vico's own words "He experiences one of the deepest felicities of mankind—the life of meditation, remote from passion, set free from the disturbing and heavy company of the body," a life "identified with the soul, which, ever present and ready, shows him his being established in the eternal that measures all time and moving in the infinite that includes all finite things; in this way life crowns him with an immense, eternal joy, which fearless of rivalry or diminution, finds the condition of growth in

continuously expanding, in continuously giving out to other human minds in ever increasing numbers.'"

In poetry there is Salvatore di Giacomo. His collected poems make a good-sized volume of 400 pages dedicated to Benedetto Croce, full of sonnets, canzoni and what he calls ariette, a sort of madrigal. These poems are like Italian music, and most of them should be chanted—little poems of love, of sentiment, of one emotion or another. They follow the long Italian tradition of ballata and canzone which presupposes that dance and song should accompany poetry:

Since music and sweet poetry agree  
As needs they must, the sister and the brother—

for the Italians, especially Italians of the South, do not separate those which nature has joined; they make music, song and dance three ingredients of one harmony. Di Giacomo has none of the theories that occupy our present American poetry; he has no unrhymed cadences, his verses keep time like the feet of a dancing faun, he has no lines that are only to be distinguished from prose by ennobling the first word of the line with a capital letter. He is all for rhyme and melody. But, to look at his pages is a little like listening to an Italian opera; music is there, melody, emotional throbs and all the emphasis of laughter or tears, but the meaning is obscured, if not wholly hidden from those who are not masters of the Neapolitan dialect in which they are all written. This veil of unintelligibility thrown over the rational aspect of the poem adds as much in one way as it detracts in another. His verses conjure up all the latent forces of imagination and quicken our poetic speculation:

What forms are these coming  
So bright through the gloom?  
What garments outglisten  
The gold-flowered broom?

We perceive the form, we catch the glitter, but only through the somewhat too dense gloom of dialect. It is true that there is a glossary in the back, very much as some editions of Burns's poems append a vocabulary to explain Scottish terms to English readers. By the aid of this glossary and helped by lucky guesses, those who have patience and leisure and are willing to put up with little lapses of understanding can make out that a sonnet on a love-letter wishes the letter to be frank and free English-fashion, full of wooing words, and that the lover puts in a sigh, a tear and a rose and wraps them up in an envelope of kisses. Some are gruesome; for instance, a sonnet depicts an incident where a company of lads and girls are at table: "Come join us." "Good day to you." "Take a seat." "Thanks, where is Vito." "He has gone out, he'll be back in a minute." "Try this melon, it has such a flavor. Take a slice, do." "I don't care for any." "Oh, do." "No, thanks, I have no appetite." "Well, take a little wine." "Thanks, just a drop." "Oh, there's Vito." Then, it seems, the inquirer after Vito invites him to go out; they go, and you hear Vito cry: "Oh, he has killed me, help me, Oh, h-e-l-p!"

The variety in the poems is very great—they range from lively to severe, from grave to gay; the foreigners get the impression that he hears the very language of the Neapolitan streets, sees the blue sky of Southern Italy, smells the orange blossom and the hedge roses, hears the waves come breaking on the beach, and over all the sense of the tragedy of life that seems to overhang these sad-eyed Southerners and force them to sing and dance and make love so much the more ardently.

One might go on with the list of men of intellectual note at Naples. There is, for instance, Vittorio Spinazzola, head of the Museo and of the excavations at Pompeii, a distinguished archæologist; but enough has been said to show how little tourists know of the serious, thinking Naples that lies behind the veil of her brilliant beauty.

*Henry Dwight Sedgwick*

## THE HOLLY WOOD

In the stranger's land, on Christmas Eve,  
Back of the firing-line they halt—  
An English troop, for a night's reprieve,  
Yet they hear the guns of the long assault.

And it chanced that a holly wood was near!  
What the morrow may bring not now they reck;  
With a single thought, so wild and dear,  
They gather the green their tents to deck!

And yet, and yet, when the morrow came,  
By the surge of the battle over swept,  
These were the two that Fate did claim . . .  
And all by the holly wood they slept.

*Edith M. Thomas*

The English troop—they are all so young!  
They jest, as they crowd their camp-fire round.  
"Heigh, ho! the green holly!" a college boy sung,  
As they lay stretched out on that alien ground.

Heigh, ho! There was silence after the song,  
While the firelight danced on the fruited spray,  
Till another spoke up, of that homesick throng,  
"Oh, lads, confound the holly, I say!"